

Father Ellwood Keiser 'Humanizing the Tube'

New York [RNS] — The priest-producer of TV's "Insight" series — and a driving force behind the new Humanitas awards for TV programs that stress human values — is convinced that the "tube" is a key medium for projecting the Judaic-Christian vision of man today.

He believes TV can serve the cause of man, improve the quality of his life and help him to grow, develop and become more fully human. He also feels that TV can provide "an experience of common brotherhood" not easily forgotten.

But to a large extent, for Father Ellwood Keiser, the predominant "distractionist" programming on television today ignores the "deeper reaches of human personality" and, in effect, "alienates man" and serves to "make him less human."

For the past 14 years, Father Keiser's "Insight" series has made a valiant — although often lonely — effort to bring to this nation's viewers, through top-notch dramatic presentations, Christian values which relate to the whole spectrum of life's experience.

And the critically-acclaimed series has made its mark. Father Keiser reports that in addition to Sunday morning and afternoon telecasting on more than 240 stations, there was a distribution of 15,000 film prints to schools, churches and organizations last year.

"But the big problem is consistently getting human values into prime-time TV," said the priest. Why?

"To promote a greater appreciation of the dignity of the human person; to deepen contemporary man's un-



FATHER KEISER

derstanding of himself, of his relationship to the human community, and to his Creator, to aid mankind's search for meaning, freedom and love, and to liberate, enrich and unify the human family," he said, quoting from his own description of the reasons for the Humanitas Prize.

Father Keiser said of the awards — which provide prizes of \$25,000, \$15,000 and \$10,000 to writers of prime-time TV fare — "nobody's matching our money" and "we feel we're going to get results."

"We also want to make the awards prestigious," he added, likening them to the Pulitzer Prizes.

Displaying a strong emotional conviction that television, prime-time television, is perhaps the key to man's "humanization," if the right forces can be applied, Father Keiser sees three concrete results: the expansion of human consciousness, a deepening of freedom and the greater unification of the human family.

Observing that occasionally programs like "The Autobiography of Miss Jane

Pittman" and "The Execution of Private Slovik" hit the mark, his point is that there are just not enough "deeply human" programs.

And he believes the American viewing public has "matured" enough to want and enjoy programming that communicates values "which most fully enrich the human person."

In addition, Father Keiser believes "life is not as grim today" as it was perhaps in the 1960s, when there was more turmoil in the nation, and that people just do not require the "distractionist" shows that help them escape from the world's realities.

The Philadelphia-born Paulist, who has been working out of Pacific Palisades, Calif., for the past decade or so, said the best way he and his Insight colleagues could devise to inspire and motivate TV programming that will humanize an audience is the Humanitas Prize. For this reason, they started the Human Family Institute as a separate non-profit, non-sectarian educational and cultural organization and requested funding from the Lilly Foundation.

COURIER ENTERTAINMENT

AS I SEE IT

Pat Cook

For those who felt that Rochester viewers owed some semblance of loyalty to local stations when dissidents began discussing the advantages of cable television, the move by station WHEC-TV may help change their minds.

Beginning Sept. 9, WHEC-TV will no longer screen the late night CBS movie which starts at 11:30 p.m.

In its place Government agents will once again battle the mafia, as depicted in "The Untouchables" starring Robert Stack as Elliott Ness.

When contacted a spokesman for WHEC-TV said the station's reason for discontinuing the movie was two-fold, i.e., the quality of recent movies was poor and movies were shown "four or five times."

As an afterthought the source cited "lack of audience" as another reason for the switch.

"The Untouchables" is an old show, comparatively speaking. Unable to remember the dates we had to check with the Rochester library to learn it first surfaced in 1958 as a special and became a series in 1959 lasting for six years until 1964. The helpful lady in the Arts Division also noted that at the height of its popularity "The Untouchables" drew the wrath of Italian Americans who were incensed at the show's portrayal of its villains. Most it seemed, had Italian names.

IF WHEC-TV follows standard

procedure in screening the series some of the shows we can look forward to (in glorious black and white) will be 15 years old. None newer than 10 years. And, again, if standard practices are followed, you can be certain some shows will be screened "four or five times."

What it boils down to is whether you'd rather see Anna Magnani, for example in "The Rose Tattoo" four or five times or the incorruptible Elliott Ness gunning down the same underworld four or five times.

Since local stations purportedly sample the pulse of the metro area from time to time, it must be that Rochester viewers are of the ilk that prefer bloodletting to Tennessee Williams.

Of course, if you are of a cynical bent it may occur to you that the economics of the thing is not to be dismissed lightly. The profit from all those commercials that will be interspersed between the bloodletting and mayhem will not have to be split with the network.

Let anyone think that WHEC-TV is the only station in town to program along economic lines, may we call your attention to WROC-TV's earlier programming of "Hee Haw" in lieu of a Saturday night movie, its rejuvenation of "Mod Squad" between 7 and 8 nightly (now replaced by "It Takes a Thief") and WOKR's incessant reliance on syndicated game shows in the same time period.

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